Paddy and cotton production

†*316. SHRI RAMJI LAL: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) the quantities of paddy and cotton produced in the country during the last three years and whether the said production is falling;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor;

(c) whether Government are aware of the fact that the farmers do not get minimum support price for paddy and cotton and this year they are suffering in the absence of reasonable prices; and

(d) if so,the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SUNDAR LAL PATWA): (a) and (b) The quantities of paddy and cotton produced during last three years including the advance estimates for 1999-2000 are given in the table below:

Year	Paddy (Million Tonnes)	Cotton (Million bales of 170 kg each)
1997-98	123.80	10.85
1998-99	128.99	12.18
1999-2000 (Advance Estimtes)	131.22	12.13

The production of paddy has been consistently increasing over the years. However, the production of cotton has been fluctuating due to agro-climatic and aberrant weather conditions.

(c) and (d) To protect the interests of farmers, both paddy and cotton are covered by the MSP scheme. Under this scheme, remunerative prices are fixed for the crops. Food Corporation of India (FCI) and Cotton Corporation of India (CCI), nodal agencies for paddy and cotton respectively, have been undertaking procurement of FAQ (Fair Average Quality) standards of these items. FCI has procured 14.46 million tonnes of paddy (in terms of rice) as on 10.3.2000 as against 9.68 million tonnes in the corresponding period last year. The prices of paddy of FAQ standard have not fallen below MSP. In case of cotton, the market price touched the support price level for a brief during November-December, 1999 in some parts of Punjab and Rajasthan.

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

Accordingly, CCI has undertaken price suppot operation and made purchases to the extent of 7772 bales of kapas from 29.11.99 to 28.1.2000.

Production of Truffle

*317. SHRI ANIL SHARMA: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) the quantity of truffle (a kind of hilly vegetable) produced in hilly States, including Himachal Pradesh, during the last five years, State-wise;

(b) whether Government have evolved or introduced any technical method of its production; if so, what are the details thereof; and

(c) whether the same is being exported; if so, to which countries and what foreign exchange has been earned during the said period, year-wise?

THE MINISTER OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SUNDAR LAL PATWA): (a) Truffle, a subterranean edible mushroom is not being cultivated in India. Some stray reports of its occurrence in forests are there but no organised collection is taking place.

(b) No, Sir. Its production technology has neither been evolved nor introduced in the country so far.

(c) Since no cultivation or organised collection of truffle is being practiced in the country, there is no possibility of its export for the present.

Posting of Envoys

*318. SHRI RAMACHANDRAIAH RUMANDLA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the manner in which postings of our envoys are decided;

(b) whether merit is the sole criteria for selection of suitable candidates; and

(c) if so, the reasons for envoys flocking to Delhi for lobbying for their postings and get plum posts?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) and (b) The postings of envoys abroad are decided on the basis of a number of considerations which include, *inter alia*, their seniority, career, relevant experience and an overall suitability for the tasks and the post.

(c) Indian envoys from abroad are required to visit the Headquarters of the